
CHAPTER 5

OFFICE WORKER SAFETY

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CHAPTER 5

OFFICE WORKER SAFETY

5.00 INTRODUCTION

Employees who work in an office environment need to be aware of risks they may encounter in order to avoid injury. Staff who occasionally travel and may enter an active work-zone need to be aware of safety protocols to be followed.

5.01 PURPOSE

This chapter provides information regarding health and safety in office settings and instructions for supervisors and employees who may have to perform fieldwork.

5.02 POLICY STATEMENT

Managers, supervisors, and employees shall do everything reasonably possible to maintain a safe and healthy work environment in all places of employment. This applies both employee is in the office and when performing other assigned duties.

5.03 BACKGROUND

The policies, practices, and standards described in this chapter are based on the following regulations: the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal-OSHA); Uniform Building Code (UBC) standards; or other cited authorities. Some of the requirements are based on departmental policies Director's Policies, Deputy Directives, Department of General Services Management Memos, and/or the State Administrative Manual (SAM).

5.04 RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

Supervisor

Supervisors are responsible for the health and safety of their employees and to ensure that the work environment does not contribute to injury or illness. In order to achieve this, supervisors are required to:

- Routinely conduct safety inspections and have regularly scheduled safety meetings with their employees to discuss health and safety issues;

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- Enforce all health and safety policies, procedures and work practices. Whenever an employee violates a health and safety policy, law, regulation or rule, supervisors shall consider appropriate disciplinary action;
 - Discuss medical or other emergency situations with their employees and emergency procedures contained in their local Emergency Action Plan;
 - Maintain in their files a copy of each employee's of "Emergency Notification Information" form for emergency information purposes (see Chapter 9 for details); and
 - Discuss potential hazards when an employee leaves his/her office to participate in a field trip.

Employee

Employees are responsible to do everything reasonably necessary to protect their own health and safety and that of others by complying with all occupational health and safety policies, procedures, laws, rules and/or regulations. To achieve this, employees are required to:

- Report to work mentally and physically capable of performing all of their assigned duties without jeopardizing the health and safety of themselves, other employees, or the public;
- Be free from the effects of medication, controlled substances, alcohol or the complications arising from illness or injury that might impair their judgement and/or ability to perform their work;
- Promptly report all injuries, illnesses, or unsafe conditions to their supervisor immediately; and
- Inform their supervisor of any changes in home address, medical condition, name of a family member or designated person to contact following an emergency, choice of predesignated personal physician, and advise their supervisor if they will need assistance during an emergency evacuation.

5.05 PHYSICAL SAFETY

Offices, storerooms, personal service rooms, hallways and passageways shall be kept clean, orderly and sanitary to the extent that the nature of the work allows. Office furniture and equipment should be arranged for efficiency, convenience, and safety.

All floors shall be free of dangerous projections or obstructions and any tripping hazards, and maintained in good repair, and be dry or slip-resistant. Defective tiles or carpet are to be reported to the building maintenance staff to be repaired.

- **Ergonomic standard**

Employees shall be provided with furniture and equipment that meets state standards (see Chapter 7 - ERGONOMICS for more details).

- **Moving furniture, equipment, or storage boxes**

Employees should not move office furniture and equipment. Supervisors should contact the Building Manager or Facility Operations office in their District or other Caltrans facility to arrange for professional movers.

- **Lifting of equipment, supplies, and other items**

There are no written standards to control the amount of weight that a person can lift without causing injury. Whenever any object is to be lifted, some discretion or judgement must be used. Employees should never lift anything that may cause injury. **Always ask for assistance.**

Inspect storage boxes, supplies, or containers with unknown or heavy contents before attempting to lift using proper lifting techniques.

See Chapter 7 - ERGONOMICS for information regarding proper lifting techniques.

Aisle and Hallway Widths

The minimum space requirements for aisles and hallways are based on the Cal-OSHA, General Industry Safety Orders (GISO) and the UBC construction standards.

The minimum requirements for office areas are:

- **Within an office or workstation, use:** **The 24” standard**

This standard requires unobstructed walking space between and around desks, chairs, bookcases, file cabinets, credenzas, other general office furniture or equipment, and/or wall partitions. The wall partitions may be portable or permanent.

- **In a hallway, walkway or common area use:** **The 44” standard**

The UBC has established a 44-inch minimum width for routes of travel by persons with disabilities. Designated hallways and walkways may be wider than 44 inches, but must have at least 44 inches of unobstructed walking space.

The 44-inch standard applies to all types of hallways and walkways, i.e., those used as egress and ingress to work areas or offices. These walkways may be main hallways of a building or they may be lateral hallways connecting work areas and/or offices. They may be between or adjacent to permanent or moveable wall partitions. An unobstructed 36 inch minimum width is required for entrance/exit from office cubicles.

The 44 inch standard is also required in walking or standing spaces found in common work areas, such as in front of storage areas or equipment or copier machines, drinking fountains, file cabinets, kitchen areas, work tables for common use, and generally any work area that is used by employees during a work shift.

Electrical Safety

Office work areas are subject to the Cal-OSHA Electrical Safety Orders (ESO). The following represents some pertinent electrical safety standards:

- Electrical power cords for computers, printers, or other electrical devices shall not be placed on the floor unprotected or where they may create a tripping hazard;
- Electrical extension cords are permitted, but shall not be used as a substitute for fixed wiring. Where possible, new electrical outlets should be installed to eliminate the need to use extension cords.
- When a telephone or electrical box on the floor is exposed, the box should be marked as a hazard until the hazard is removed.

Securing Furniture and Equipment

To be prepared for emergencies such as earthquakes, certain office furniture and equipment should be secured to walls or floors.

The following guidelines should be followed when securing office furniture and equipment:

- File cabinets/storage cabinets, five (5) feet or shorter need not be secured to walls or floors;
- File cabinets/storage cabinets between five (5) feet and six (6) feet should be placed against and secured to permanent walls;
- If wall space is not available, file/storage cabinets between five (5) feet and six (6) feet may be placed back-to-back in open areas, and secured to each other or the floor;
- File cabinets/storage cabinets (6) feet or taller shall be placed against and secured to permanent walls.
- If wall space is not available, file/storage cabinets six (6) feet or taller may be placed in open areas, provided they are placed back-to-back and secured to each other and to the floor.

Material and Office Supply Storage

Office supplies should be stored in appropriate areas set aside for that purpose, and not where they could contribute to injury.

Do not:

1. Store materials on top of modular furniture, overheads or cabinets;
2. Store materials above the level of your shoulders;
3. Place objects such as flower pots and vases on windowsills or ledges;
4. Place card index files, dictionaries, or other heavy objects on top of file cabinets taller than five (5) feet;
5. Use storage boxes (cardboard boxes) as room dividers; and/or
6. Use walkways, hallways, stairwells and/or landings for storage.

Walkways and hallways should be maintained free of all obstructions or impediments for use in case of an emergency.

NOTE:

If materials (office supplies or records) must be stored in cardboard boxes, they are to be piled, stacked, or racked in a manner designed to prevent them from tipping, falling, collapsing, rolling, or spreading.

Stairways

All stair tread surfaces shall be slip-resistant. Stairways shall be maintained in good repair having handrails on each side. Stairways shall not be used as storage areas and must be kept free of tripping hazards.

Exit Signs

Exit signs or directional signs, or both, shall be provided at every exit door, at the intersection of corridors, at exit stairways or ramps, and at other locations as necessary to inform occupants of the means of egress available.

Electrically illuminated exit signs shall be lighted with at least two electric lamps. Burnt out electric lamps shall be replaced in a timely manner.

Door Openings

Door openings should be kept clear. Doors marked “Fire Door, Do Not Block,” or other special notice should not be changed or altered.

Solid doors (without windows) can present hazards when approached from both sides at the same time. Employees should be warned of this hazard and instructed to:

- Approach solid doors slowly;
- Stay out of the path of an opening door; and/or,
- Reach for the doorknob to avoid contact with the body and arms.

Doors that open onto a hallway or open directly into the path of on-coming foot traffic should be approached slowly. The swing radius of doors can be marked on the floor.

5.06 TRIP PLANNING

In preparation for field work, the employee should review the Code of Safe Work Practices (COSWP) for field trips located at the end of this chapter. The supervisor shall discuss with the employee the following items:

- Scope and COSWP applicable for any of the worksites they may enter;
- Risks of the work area, facility, or highway, including such things as traffic volume, number of lanes, shoulder widths, possible sites for parking, fences, gates, etc;
- Assembly of all safety and personal protective equipment (PPE), materials, and other equipment that will be required to perform the work; and
- Transportation arrangements, including the use of seat belts and shoulder harnesses while in the vehicle.

5.07 MOTEL, HOTEL, DINING OUT AND SIGHTSEEING SAFETY

Supervisors shall discuss information about travel status, visiting other cities, and potential hazards associated with being in a different working environment. Discussions should include personal safety and precautions regarding motel/hotel safety, dining out, shopping and sightseeing.

NOTE:

National media reports continue to focus attention on employees in both the public and private sector that have become victims of assaults or other forms of violent acts while working. It is important that managers, supervisors, and employees are aware of any potential for violence while working in the field and what actions can be taken if an employee is confronted with an act of violence, a threat, verbal or personal harassment, or intimidation.

Chapter 6 - WORKPLACE VIOLENCE, provides information that may help employees understand and/or handle a potentially dangerous situation that they may encounter while in field work.

5.08 PERSONAL CLOTHING

Employees are expected to report to work reasonably dressed to protect them from exposure to usual and/or predictable physical and environmental conditions found in the work place.

Employees shall be given adequate advance notice of field trips so they may properly dress to protect themselves while in the new work environment, and/or be protected from exposure to potentially unsafe conditions in a new assignment.

5.09 VISITING A CONSTRUCTION OR MAINTENANCE PROJECT

To ensure employee safety when visiting a Construction or Maintenance project the following guidelines should be followed:

- Phone or e-mail the Resident Engineer (RE) in advance so they know that you will be visiting. The RE will be able to tell what operations the contractor may be doing when you visit.
- All personnel should check in at RE office prior to going on the construction site. If no one is available at the office, please check in with the field inspector at the job site. You will be provided with a quick review of the Code of Safe Practices for the ongoing activity that day and any other significant information you might need to ensure both your safety and the contractor's ability to continue their job progress unabated
- Bring Personal Protective Equipment. You will be required to wear, at the minimum, a hardhat, appropriate warning garments (a safety vest), and safety glasses. Other safety gear may be required, please check with the RE to see if additional safety equipment is

needed. You will not be allowed to enter or stay in the construction zone without this equipment.

5.10 WORKING ON STREETS AND HIGHWAYS

Whenever employees work on a city street, highway or freeway, , the work should be planned and organized to minimize exposure to moving vehicular traffic. The supervisor should contact the local Maintenance Region office or Construction office for information regarding planned lane closures or construction work in the area.

When parking and/or stopping on the shoulder area of a highway, the motor vehicles shall be parked in a manner to provide a physical barrier between the employee and any traffic that may enter the work zone. If the vehicle is not needed as a physical barrier, it shall be parked as far off the paved shoulder area as possible. Carefully choose a location to ensure the vehicle will not affect passing traffic, nor interfere with employees' view of oncoming traffic.

When it is impractical to use barrier vehicles, guardrails or other physical barriers, a lookout should be assigned to provide errant vehicle warnings. The lookout is exclusively responsible to closely observe approaching traffic to assess any unusual vehicle movement or errant driver behavior and warn other workers whenever trouble is anticipated. Lookout assignments should be changed frequently to maintain a high degree of alertness.

Working in median areas

All employees should receive specialized training regarding the hazards unique to median work areas, and when working adjacent to moving highway traffic prior to working in median areas.

For work performed in a median area, the following precautions shall be taken:

- Employees should park their vehicles within the median area where crossing the traffic lane on foot is not necessary;
- Exit the vehicle on the off-traffic side; and
- In narrow medians, exit the vehicle on the side that will present the least exposure.

If the vehicle cannot be safely parked within the median area and the traffic lane must be crossed on foot, the following precautions must be taken:

- Wait for a break in the flow of vehicular traffic in all lanes that allows for safely crossing a traffic lane;
- Do not carry any items or materials that might hinder your visibility or movement;
- If the traffic volume is too heavy, wait until it is safe to cross the lanes; and
- If the work cannot be performed as planned due to high traffic volumes, the supervisor shall reevaluate the work activity to prevent unnecessary exposure of employees to vehicular traffic.

Amber warning lights

Section 25256 of the California Vehicle Code (CVC) allows Caltrans vehicles to display flashing/rotating amber warning lights, “. . . when such vehicles are parked or working on the highway.”

Amber lights should only be used to alert motorists of workers on foot or operations near the traveled way. Do not use the amber lights while driving, when parked in an established lane closure, or when no danger to employees exists.

5.11 NIGHT WORK

Employees should be given sufficient advance notice of a night work operation to allow them to adjust their schedules and avoid unnecessary fatigue.

Supervisors shall discuss the hazards and PPE unique to working at night. If employees will be exposed to vehicular traffic, PPE (including hard hat, eye protection, foot wear, and other clothing, such as for cold-weather or heat stress) shall be discussed and/or required.

5.12 HAZARDOUS SPILLS

If an employee discovers a spill of an unknown material or substance on a highway or street, the employee should:

- During regular working hours, call the Maintenance RM's office, if known, or the Caltrans Communications Center, or the California Highway Patrol (CHP) (through 911);
- Stay clear and "up wind," if possible, and avoid contact with the unidentified material;
- Provide traffic control (e.g., closing a traffic lane or other traffic management); and
- Call for assistance and wait for the experts.

If an employee determines that his/her personal safety may be in jeopardy, he/she should leave the area, and telephone appropriate authorities from the nearest safe another location.

CODE OF SAFE WORK PRACTICES

FIELD TRIPS

PREPARING FOR A FIELD TRIP

PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

TYPICAL FIELD TRIP HAZARDS:

1. Adverse weather conditions
2. Slippery roadways
3. Moving vehicular or equipment traffic/traffic congestion
4. Hazardous parking areas
5. Noise
6. Impaired drivers
7. Footing on uneven terrain
8. Poor visibility
9. Contact with flying particles
10. Bending, stooping and lifting objects

SAFE WORK PRACTICES

TYPICAL PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID INJURY:

1. Review Safety Manual for fieldwork safety items
2. Wear appropriate footwear, hard hat, safety glasses, and warning garments
3. Wear appropriate personal clothing
4. Perform pre-operation inspection on vehicle
5. Bend, stoop, and lift properly
6. Obey traffic laws
7. Be alert for other motorists
8. Stop and/or park vehicle in safe place
9. Exit vehicle properly, away from traffic
10. Avoid backing vehicle if possible
11. Use physical protection from traffic where practicable such as (e.g.; a vehicle, guardrail, K-rail, etc.)
12. Work facing traffic and/or use a lookout
13. Wear hearing protection as required